

TESTIMONY OF CONGRESSMAN CHRIS JOHN

TO

HOUSE TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

July 15, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak before the Committee this morning. As we sit here today, a little bit more of America washes away. Louisiana's vanishing coastline takes with it important cultural, economic, and societal benefits to our nation. The witnesses following this panel can describe in personal detail the devastating effect of coastal erosion on the communities, businesses, and infrastructure in south Louisiana. Coastal erosion is a race against time in Louisiana and today we are losing the battle.

During my past 8 years in Washington, I have worked to make coastal restoration a priority here in Congress. My colleague, Congressman Billy Tauzin, deserves particular credit for his leadership in the House on this effort during his long career of service. So does Chairman Young who has worked with us for the past several years on a solution.

Last week the Administration released a revised coastal restoration plan that authorizes up to \$1.9 billion in federal and state spending for the next 10 years. I am encouraged now to see the Administration lending credence to this issue. Acknowledging responsibility for federal policies that have significantly contributed to the coastal land loss is an important step toward making this project a reality. While I applaud this effort to sustain the ecology, culture, and economy of America's Wetland, I am also concerned about the plans for funding this initiative.

Coastal restoration will require a commitment of federal dollars, and lots of them, to provide tangible results. Before the recently revised near-term proposal for coastal restoration, the federal government, along with the Administration of Governor Foster in Louisiana, put together a comprehensive approach resulting from over 5 years and \$24 million of investments of public and private resources. The resulting "Coast 2050" plan called for as much as \$14 billion in coastal investment over 30 years. Although this plan was revised to fit the priorities of this Administration and Congress, both the original \$14 billion plan and the revised \$2 billion plan will require significant federal resources. With the budget realities we are facing today, it will take a united front and overwhelming bipartisan support to make this project a reality.

With the broad support of members of this committee, the House has passed impact assistance legislation tied to federal royalties on offshore oil and gas production on more than one occasion, but appropriators have fought our efforts to create a mandatory spending mechanism. A blueprint of how to move forward is important, but the funding to accompany this plan is critical. For instance, Governor Blanco requested \$50 million

to kick-start this initiative through the 2005 federal budget, yet she received less than one-sixth of that request (\$8 million) through the President's budget.

While the coastal restoration plan will undoubtedly continue to evolve over the next 30 years, our coastal ecology, communities, and economy cannot sustain themselves while we wait for budget surpluses to fund this initiative. There is no such thing as a viable short term fix or small scale restoration proposal for such a large scale restoration and conservation effort. The state and local governments in Louisiana have done their part to dedicate funds for coastal restoration. We must now ensure that the federal government does its part to keep this national treasure above water.